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# General Assembly
Sixty-third session

*Official Records*

**17**th plenary meeting
Thursday, 2 October 2008, 10 a.m.
New York

*President:* Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**High-level plenary meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action**

**Agenda item 52**

**Groups of countries in special situations**

**(b) Specific actions related to the particular needs and problems of landlocked developing countries: outcome of the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/63/165)**

**Draft resolution (A/63/L.3*)**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): The General Assembly, in accordance with resolution 62/204 of 19 December 2007, will now begin the two-day high-level meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Members will recall that in resolution 62/204 the General Assembly requested the President of the General Assembly to convene consultations during the sixty-second session of the Assembly to facilitate the preparation of an outcome document for the midterm review and to finalize its organizational aspects. In this regard, in a letter dated 29 September 2008, I informed members of the speakers for this opening plenary meeting.

Members will further recall that the two-day meeting will consist of plenary meetings and a panel discussion.

(*spoke in English*)

I am very pleased to welcome everyone to this high-level plenary meeting on the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. Over the next two days we will focus our attention on the impressive work under way to ensure that landlocked developing countries have transit transport systems to facilitate their access to international trade despite their physical isolation.

Earlier this week the General Assembly concluded its general debate. I was very pleased that we devoted our time and effort to two high-level meetings on the special needs of Africa and on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Both meetings were of particular interest to landlocked countries. It is notable that nine of the fourteen countries with the lowest human development index scores last year are landlocked.

World leaders were in agreement that the turmoil of the world's financial markets must not jeopardize the funding commitments made to Africa and to the MDGs. Representatives of landlocked developing countries know more than anyone the vulnerability of their economies to erratic markets and soaring transportation costs. I promise to do all that I can as

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President of the General Assembly to assure the continuing support of the international community for landlocked nations.

We are living in troubled times, and billions of people are looking to the United Nations to fulfil the promises of security and well-being that they have entrusted to us.

As I look at the accomplishments since the 2003 Almaty Conference, I am heartened to see the central and effective role the United Nations is playing in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Facilitating negotiations and assisting in the implementation of complex development projects is what the United Nations is all about. The success of the Programme can only strengthen the United Nations at a time when it is looking to enhance its participation in international economic policy-making.

The 2003 Almaty Conference aimed to forge global partnerships to address the special needs of the countries concerned by tackling their continued marginalization from the world economy in a focused, but holistic, fashion.

The resulting Almaty Programme of Action outlines a clear set of priorities for action in transit policy issues, infrastructure development and maintenance, international trade and trade facilitation, and international support measures.

There has been considerable progress since the Almaty Programme of Action was adopted five years ago. Thanks to their cooperative efforts, donor nations, a range of international, regional and subregional organizations and financial institutions have stepped up their targeted assistance and support for the landlocked and transit developing countries.

In and of itself, the decision by the General Assembly to convene the present midterm review of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action reflects the commitment of the international community to the Programme's full and effective implementation.

However, much more needs to be done to achieve the Programme's overarching goal of establishing efficient transit transport systems in all landlocked regions of the world.

Geographical realities, coupled with critical infrastructure deficiencies, as well as cumbersome border crossing procedures, continue to pose daunting impediments to the external trade of landlocked developing countries.

Landlocked country export development is severely constrained by rising transit transport costs. These limit the range of potential exports and markets in which goods can be competitively and profitably traded.

Today, high trade transaction costs remain the single most important obstacle to equitable and competitive access by landlocked countries to global markets.

This midterm review is an extremely important exercise to assess what has been achieved so far and what can be done better. It will guide the second half of the implementation period of the Almaty Programme so that it can more effectively assist landlocked developing countries in their effective integration in the international trading system.

We know that success thus far has depended on a range of partners. They have enabled the establishment of more effective transit transport systems that benefit landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours in all regions of the world.

The generosity and support of Member States has been, and will be, crucial to safeguard the progress achieved and to accelerate progress in the years ahead. In this regard, I would like to express special thanks to Mr. Yukio Takasu of Japan for his excellent work in facilitating the negotiation process of the outcome document that Member States are expected to adopt tomorrow.

Let us all reaffirm in the course of this meeting the crucial importance of these partnerships, with the United Nations systems chief among them.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

I now call on the Secretary-General.

**The Secretary-General**: Last week I convened a high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We used the occasion to review progress towards attaining the MDGs. I sounded alarm bells that we were running out of time to honour commitments made to the developing world.

The response was overwhelming. Governments, foundations, civil society groups and businesses joined

hands. We managed to forge new partnerships and prepare new action plans to speed up progress. We generated unprecedented commitments in pledges to help the world's poor. The final figures are not in yet, but the total may be as much as $16 billion. I am now more hopeful about attaining the MDGs by 2015.

Today we are sounding alarm bells for the Almaty Programme of Action. I hope for a similarly hope-inspiring response.

Too many of the landlocked developing countries are not on track to meeting the MDGs. According to the United Nations Development Programme, they account for 10 of the 20 countries with the lowest level of human development.

It is vital that landlocked developing countries increase their volume of exports in order to meet the MDGs. Currently the world's 31 landlocked developing countries account for less than 1 per cent of global merchandise trade.

The single biggest obstacle to increasing this share is the very high cost of transport. In some landlocked developing countries, transport costs can exceed 70 per cent of the export value. This has become a bigger barrier to trade than tariffs. Clearly, we need a more vigorous effort for international cooperation.

There has been some encouraging progress in implementing the Almaty Programme. Many countries are improving transit transport policies. This is making it easier for landlocked countries to use neighbouring countries' ports and roads. Trade facilitation has also reduced the costs of doing business.

Much more now needs to be done in the area of infrastructure development. Roads and railways remain inadequate. Many ports are using obsolete cargo handling equipment. We need to mobilize more international support in order to improve infrastructure.

The Millennium Summit of September 2000 committed to addressing the special needs of landlocked developing countries. The Almaty Programme of Action translates that commitment into specific actions.

The United Nations supports the Almaty Programme by working with countries to develop integrated transport networks; modernize customs operations; build capacities for trade negotiations; and develop indicators for monitoring progress. We are building partnerships with financial institutions and regional development banks in our activities.

The achievements so far are encouraging. But we need full implementation by all partners in order to make significant progress. Let us use the success of the high-level event on the MDGs as inspiration for this review.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Mongolia, His Excellency Mr. Nambar Enkhbayar.

**President Enkhbayar**: I am pleased to address the opening meeting of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action.

I strongly commend the leadership of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in galvanizing the activities of the United Nations system organizations in our concerted efforts to implement the Programme. Mongolia also extends its high appreciation to High Representative Cheick Diarra and his Office for the coherent coordination of all the preparatory activities in the lead-up to this high-level review.

Over the coming two days we will engage in an extensive discussion to take stock of the progress achieved so far in moving forward the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, to share the lessons learned and identify future actions to speed up its realization through addressing the still persistent constraints.

It is gratifying to note that over the last five years the landlocked and transit developing countries, with the support of their developed partners, have registered certain headway in all five priority areas of the Programme. They have strengthened their policy reform efforts, including the liberalization of transit and transport services; increased accession to relevant international conventions; the establishment of regional inter-modal transport corridors; and harmonization of common rules and standards.

The international community has come to better recognize that high transit transport costs represent a more important barrier than most favoured nation tariffs for landlocked developing countries. As a result it is encouraging that there is a much broader recognition of the special needs of landlocked developing countries per se and a stronger engagement

of development partners with respect to transport infrastructure development and trade facilitation, as well as aid, debt relief and market access.

Multilateral and development institutions and regional organizations also tend to allocate greater attention and resources to the establishment of efficient transit systems. All these efforts are encouraging and ought to be further consolidated for the effective and full implementation of the Programme.

The past few years have been somewhat favourable for the overall economic development and growth of landlocked developing countries as a group. According to the Secretary-General's report (A/63/165), the gross domestic product of the landlocked developing countries grew annually by almost 8 per cent in the period 2003-2006. Foreign direct investment has also seen a certain increase over the same period. In addition, as of 2006 more than 90 per cent of exports of landlocked developing countries to developed markets enjoyed duty-free access, a significant increase from 70 per cent back in 2003.

Despite these positive developments, landlocked developing countries continue to face considerable challenges inherently linked to their geographical handicap. Over the past decade, their share in world exports has remained unacceptably dismal — well below 0.6 per cent — with commodities accounting for the bulk of exports.

In our case, transit transport costs through Russia and China amount to up to 8 per cent of our GDP. Hence, with a view to promoting a comprehensive subregional agreement designed to harmonize transit regulations and reduce transit transport costs, Mongolia has initiated a Tripartite Framework Agreement on Transit Transportation with its two neighbours. The draft agreement has been agreed in principle, and negotiations continue on annexes.

The agreement, once concluded, will provide a legal framework for efficient transit systems to and through Mongolia by allowing freedom of transit by all modes of transport and promoting simplification, harmonization and standardization of customs, administrative procedures and documentation.

Subregional and regional cooperation and integration of landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours play an important role in effectively addressing cross-border trade and transit transport problems. In this context, we welcome the regional initiatives aimed at promoting the development of regional rail and road transit transport networks, including the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway Agreements, to which Mongolia has already become a party.

The continued marginalization of landlocked developing countries from the international trading system prevents them from fully using trade as an instrument for achieving the respective MDGs. It is disheartening that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report (2007-2008) shows that 10 out of 20 of the lowest-ranking countries in the human development index were landlocked developing countries. Their situation is being further exacerbated by the current global food, energy and financial crises.

In this regard, we need to seize this opportunity of reviewing the implementation of the Programme to explore new avenues on how to urgently respond to these global development challenges, both existing and emerging.

Increased international assistance for export diversification, infrastructure development, institutional capacity-building and better market access are essential for landlocked developing countries. As high transaction cost represents the main cause of the marginalization of these countries from the international trading system, the current negotiations on market access for agricultural and non-agricultural goods should, in our view, give particular attention to products from landlocked developing countries.

In addition, trade facilitation negotiations, especially the part on GATT article V, present an opportunity to set internationally applicable rules and standards that are most urgently needed. In this respect, I reiterate my earlier proposal, voiced at the Ulaanbaatar thematic meeting last year to consider negotiating a separate, multilateral agreement on issues covered by GATT Article V on Freedom of Transit.

The Ulaanbaatar meeting on trade and trade facilitation and the Burkina Faso meeting on infrastructure development constitute an important part of the substantive preparations in the run-up to this midterm review. I gather that the publications on the outcome of these thematic meetings are being launched by the Office of the High Representative.

With a view to maximizing the efficiency of our coordinated efforts in promoting the interests of landlocked developing countries, including effective and full implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, I recently proposed to set up an international think-tank and offered to host it in Ulaanbaatar. I am pleased that this initiative has enjoyed active support from our fellow members of the group.

We are also hopeful that the relevant bodies of the United Nations system and international and regional financial institutions, along with our development partners, will step in to ensure its efficient and effective functioning.

As for the national implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, Mongolia has introduced several innovative measures to build policy framework and to promote public-private partnership. On my initiative, the MDG-based National Development Strategy — a comprehensive mid- and long-term development blueprint — was approved earlier this year. The Strategy makes human development and modernization of infrastructure as a key priority for making Mongolia a middle-income country by 2021.

Furthermore, a National Committee on Trade and Transport Facilitation, set in motion in 2005, is entrusted with a mandate to serve as a nationwide coordinator for the Programme's implementation. It is composed of representatives of government, the private sector, academia and non-governmental organizations to ensure a broad-based partnership.

Also, with active participation of all stakeholders, Mongolia has developed a comprehensive sector development Programme called Transit Mongolia incorporating all Programme priorities and Mongolia-specific goals. Hence, we believe that creation of a designated institutional mechanism along with the relevant plan of action lays a sound foundation for the Programme's effective implementation. In addition, active engagement of investors, both foreign and national, and the local business community helps to better mobilize the needed resources, both financial and human.

Finally, I wish to emphasize the crucial role of regional and international cooperation in ensuring effective implementation of the Programme. In this regard, my delegation fully endorses the related provisions in the draft outcome document to be adopted at the end of our review meeting.

We commend the considerable efforts made by United Nations bodies, in particular that of the Office of the High Representative, in coordinating system-wide activities towards Programme implementation. We also acknowledge the important work and support provided by our development partners, both bilateral and multilateral, including the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the regional commissions, the World Bank and the regional development banks.

I wish the Assembly a successful review with a productive outcome.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the President of Mongolia for the statement he has just made.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hamed Diane Semega, Minister of Equipment and Transport of Mali.

**Mr. Semega** (Mali) (*spoke in French*): As Mali's Minister of Equipment and Transport, and chairman of the Mali delegation, I wish on behalf of Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali and Chairman of the Group of the Landlocked Developing Countries, to convey his fraternal greetings.

I also, on behalf of the 31 members of our Group, salute Mr. Choummaly Sayasone, President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, who has energetically and skilfully led the work of the Group since its foundation in 1994. His mandate has certainly yielded positive results; suffice it to recall his valuable, decisive role in the adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action.

In addition, I thank the President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan A. Nazarbayev, whose country hosted the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation, a historic meeting, whose recommendations are enshrined in what is now known as the Almaty Programme.

The Group of the Landlocked Developing Countries expresses its gratitude to Ambassador Chowdhury, who, as Under-Secretary-General with responsibility for landlocked developing countries, showed a constant commitment and total devotion to

his noble mission and produced many relevant initiatives.

Finally, I warmly congratulate my compatriot Ambassador Cheick Sidi Diarra on the lofty mission which Mr Ban Ki-moon has entrusted to him.

The midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action that we are beginning comes five years after its adoption by resolution 58/201 of 23 December 2003.

The problems of development must be analysed within the framework of the globalization of economies. The landlocked developing countries are no exception. To the contrary, most of us are excluded from international trade, and those which do take part are largely at the mercy of the vicissitudes of the world economy.

I believe that it will be useful to outline the serious constraints imposed by geography on our countries in their struggle for economic and social development.

A few figures speak for themselves. The 31 landlocked developing countries cover 12.5 per cent of the surface of the globe, with their 16.3 million square kilometres, and have 370 million inhabitants, or 5.5 per cent of the world's population, which is estimated to be more than 6 billion, yet they generate only 2 per cent of the gross world product. Their fundamental characteristic is their distance from the sea, resulting in excessive transport costs. Kazakhstan is the landlocked country most distant from the sea, with its nearest accessible port 3,750 kilometres away. It is true that there are certain differences between our countries, which include some oil producers and exporters.

The external debt of the landlocked developing countries is becoming harder and harder to sustain. As to external trade, their competitiveness is greatly affected by everything to do with transport and transit. Therefore, with limited export resources, we must deplore the limited and very poorly diversified supply capacities, which usually result in only poor products. A consequence for the developing countries is a notorious weakness of their physical infrastructure, whose development is too costly for their budgets.

One last figure: the landlocked developing countries have transaction costs linked to transport averaging between 15 per cent and 25 per cent, about twice those of transit countries and more than three times those of the developed countries.

With all those facts, the challenges we face have never been so difficult as they are today. Three crises, including the international financial crisis, have hit us in swift succession, particularly in the last two years. If they have severely shaken the developed countries and less fragile developing countries, it is easy to imagine how much they threaten the very socio-economic and political foundations of the landlocked developing countries.

If the international community does not react with more determination and more consistently, the sacrifices made by the landlocked developing countries, together with our partners, will have been in vain. The encouraging results registered by these countries for more than a decade, particularly in restructuring and adapting their economies to the demands of globalization, will thus be wasted.

We are here at the midterm review to make clearly understood the strong apprehensions expressed in our countries and to mobilize the international community. The worsening situation of our countries requires action by all, particularly by the developed countries, but also, to a lesser extent, by the emerging countries.

In his report of 13 August 2007, the Secretary-General stated:

> "The midterm review of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action is an important exercise aimed at determining, among other things, what has been achieved so far, what could have been done better and how the second half of the implementation period can be effectively utilized to advance on the ultimate goal of assisting landlocked developing countries." (*A/62/226, para. 23*)

With globalization becoming more manifest every day, countries must be increasingly competitive in order to play a bigger part in the world's multilateral trade system, through the World Trade Organization, whose rules provide instruments allowing the developing countries to prepare themselves better for global competition.

By way of example I would mention the special and differential treatment, which, beyond granting transition periods to come up to the required level, will

make possible the granting of a period of time to implement technical assistance and strengthen the capacities of the landlocked developing countries.

In this regard, on behalf of the Group of the Landlocked Developing Countries, I warmly thank the World Bank and the World Trade Organization for supporting our countries in establishing a methodology for self-evaluation of national situations. Such analysis will make possible notification of the time needed to implement their obligations and particularly details of technical assistance and strengthening of the necessary capacities.

My thanks also go to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development for setting up a negotiating group of our countries and strengthening their capacity to familiarize national experts with the machinery of trade negotiations.

Today's meeting gives me an opportunity to thank, for their constant support, the whole United Nations family, and particularly the Secretary-General, whose support in various forms has undoubtedly made it possible to advance towards implementation of the Almaty Programme.

I also thank the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, mandated by Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General, to organize this review and coordinate the preparatory work, and I congratulate it on the clarity and effectiveness of this action.

I conclude with an African saying: When two elephants fight, it is the savannah grass that suffers. In the context of globalization, the Almaty Programme of Action is certainly not a magic wand, but its full and active implementation will make it possible for the landlocked developing countries not to be the grass crushed in the vacant lot of globalization, by permitting them to take part in global economic competition. That would be justice.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Minister for Foreign Affairs of India.

**Mr. Mukherjee** (India): The Almaty Programme of Action has resulted in a clear acknowledgement of the special needs and problems of landlocked developing countries, including the need for sustained international support to address them.

Equally important is the understanding that any effective solution must address the constraints and challenges faced by the transit developing countries neighbouring landlocked developing countries.

Yet our review shows that the devil does indeed lie in the details of the implementation.

Despite their best efforts, landlocked developing countries have not been able to take full advantage of the global growth witnessed since Almaty, and many of them remain marginalized from the international trading system.

Modernization of trade facilitation and transit procedures remains pending, primarily due to lack of their own resources and capacities and financial and technical assistance.

Thus it is no coincidence that of the 31 landlocked developing countries 16 continue to be classified as least developed countries. The current global food and energy crises have made their problems more acute.

It is therefore imperative that we utilize this opportunity to make a genuine assessment of challenges to the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Various reports by the United Nations and other bodies clearly identify lack of resources as a key barrier to implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Transit transport infrastructure projects involve high investments and long gestation periods, usually with low rates of return and comparative higher risks.

Naturally, it becomes difficult to attract private sector investment, particularly in countries where the private sector itself is not well developed.

Official development assistance (ODA) therefore remains critical for long-term funding. Yet, regrettably, ODA to the transport sector has actually fallen in the landlocked developing countries.

Moreover, infrastructure development needs to be complemented by efficient storage and logistics management systems and integrated information and communication networks. It also requires seamless integration of transport infrastructures of landlocked countries with the transit transport infrastructure of their transit developing countries, as well as with any

special transit transport corridor. Inter-modal transport also needs to be encouraged. All these require significant financial and technical assistance, as well as capacity-building.

Transit developing countries themselves face many development challenges. Yet they take on additional costs of providing transit transport facilities to landlocked countries even when areas in their own countries remain as remote from the sea as those of the landlocked countries. While the transit developing countries undertake this in a spirit of cooperation and friendship, they also need to be provided enhanced international support.

Other assistance envisaged in the Almaty Programme of Action has also been limited. Debt relief has not translated into additional resources, since much of the debt was already in arrears. Technology transfer has not been effective. We need to put in place a proactive mechanism that promotes technology transfer at concessional and preferential rates.

Enhancing international trade from landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries is crucial for their development. This requires an enabling international environment. Developed countries need to provide enhanced market access to products of special interest to landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries. The overarching principle of the special and differential treatment remains a categorical imperative.

Trade and transit issues are inextricably linked. Enhancement of trade facilitation, customs control efficiency and simplification of documentation and procedures for international trade require technical and financial assistance.

We must also remain cognizant that there are significant regional variations in implementing the Almaty Programme, and one size cannot fit all. Bilateral initiatives, where appropriate, also play a key role.

The enhanced focus on challenges facing landlocked developing countries has highlighted that there are regions within some developing countries that have difficulty in accessing global markets on account of geography or political boundaries. This lack of easy access to the sea and remoteness from international markets causes them to face challenges similar to those faced by landlocked developing countries. It would be appropriate to recognize the need and call for cooperation to meet the special transit requirements of landlocked regions of a country.

We have excellent historical ties with our landlocked neighbours, and accord the highest importance to further strengthening these links, including through cooperation on transit transport issues. We have also contributed to the development efforts of other landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries as part of South-South cooperation.

Landlocked countries with a contiguous border with us have special bilateral cooperation agreements for easy transit of their goods through India.

Regional initiatives to improve transit connectivity and intraregional trade are equally a priority for us. We also continue to join our landlocked neighbours in financial partnerships for infrastructure development, and make available technical, economic and capacity-building support.

We hope that this midterm review will invigorate the implementation of the Almaty Programme, including the provision of enhanced assistance from the international community.

Before I conclude let me thank Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and his team for the excellent work they are doing, and their efforts in making this review meeting a success.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hans Winkler, State Secretary for European and International Affairs of Austria.

**Mr. Winkler** (Austria): First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to address the Assembly in this debate on landlocked developing countries, which I consider not only timely, but also of the utmost importance.

Despite real progress towards the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially in the area of poverty reduction, it is still the least developed countries, the landlocked developing countries and the small island States that are the most adversely affected. They need our paramount attention,

as the relevant reports on the implementation and progress of the MDGs point out.

The year 2008 has seen a number of important events on development cooperation with participation at the political level, including many Heads of State and Government. I personally attended the twelfth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, both held in Accra earlier this year, which confirmed that the group of States that we are addressing today indeed require our special attention.

I also recall the Africa and Millennium Development Goal summits of the General Assembly, held a few days ago, which the Austrian Federal President and the Austrian Federal Chancellor attended.

Moreover, we are currently preparing the Doha Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, which will take place at the end of November through the beginning of December.

All these high-level meetings would have been of no avail if not followed by concrete action. Therefore, it is high time now to substantially increase our common efforts — developed and developing countries alike — in order to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for all countries and peoples in the world.

Austria views the Almaty Programme of Action as a significant landmark in the recognition of the special needs and problems of landlocked developing countries. Our common goal must be to effectively integrate them into the world economy. That is a precondition for poverty-reduction and achievement of the MDGs.

At the midpoint of the Almaty Programme of Action we must take stock of where we stand in our common efforts to support landlocked developing countries in overcoming their development constraints.

Thirty-one landlocked developing countries in the world continue to face serious constraints in their efforts to achieve the goals of fighting poverty and elevating the living standards of their population. According to the 2007-2008 Human Development Index rankings, eight of the 12 countries with the lowest Human Development Index scores are landlocked, 10 landlocked countries are classified as among those with low human development, and not a single one of the non-European landlocked countries is classified among those with high human development.

One reason why economic and human development indicators for landlocked countries are generally so much worse than those for their maritime neighbours is their dependence on other countries' transit routes for access to overseas markets.

Landlocked developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa are especially adversely affected. The isolation from world markets, poor infrastructure, communication problems and logistics delays significantly increase the costs for African firms and impose an additional burden on their economies. The cost penalties borne by the private sector, particularly for transport and energy, are daunting, more than wiping out any comparative advantages these countries might have, such as lower labour costs.

Allow me to share Austria's experience as a landlocked, predominantly mountainous country in the middle of Europe. Our geopolitical situation after the Second World War — at the border between two different political and economic systems — proved to be an obstacle to trade and economic integration. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the removal of the Iron Curtain in 1989, Austria's membership in the European Union, from 1995, and the enlargement of the European Union towards Eastern Europe provided Austria with unprecedented economic opportunities and welfare for its population.

Our example shows that not only the right economic and social environment but also enabling geopolitical conditions are required to further regional integration and cooperation. Today, as a member of the European Union, Austria has access to all ports of European Union member States across roads, railways and inland navigation. Transit and access to the Black Sea ports are ensured on the basis of the Danube Convention, which regulates and guarantees free traffic on the Danube.

During the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, which took place from 1973 through 1982, Austria chaired the group of the so-called geographically disadvantaged States, most of them landlocked developing countries. In this position, Austria represented their interests, mainly concentrating on participation in research regarding the use of marine resources, representation in the entities

of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the question of transit rights and access to the sea.

European integration provided valuable assistance to us. Joint planning of transport facilities and routes, as well as collective financial aid to support projects in the infrastructure sector, makes it possible to combat the negative environmental effects of transit traffic.

Because of our own history and experience, Austria focuses its development cooperation with partners in landlocked developing countries such as Burkina Faso, Uganda, Ethiopia, Bhutan, Moldova and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Special emphasis is given to supporting regional infrastructure development in sub-Saharan Africa and to contributing to the European Union-Africa Trust Fund on Infrastructure.

On the basis of our own experience, and because this is supported by statistics and facts, I would like to stress the significance of regional integration. It cannot be stressed enough. It provides security and peace, and prevents crisis through common political and economic stability and a common legal framework, which constitute the basic prerequisites for transit and free access to the sea.

With that in mind, I conclude, Mr. President, by wishing you — and us all — a successful meeting.

*The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.*